



Remembering Renuka

by Family Members

2025

At home and in our village, everyone affectionately called Renuka “Chittamma.” She was born on October 14, 1970 — the only daughter of father Gumudavelly Somayya and Jayamma (Yashoda), and the middle child between two brothers. As the only girl in the family, she was dearly loved. The entire village doted on her. Unlike many other girls of her generation, she was never burdened with household chores or forced to learn cooking. Her parents gave her space and freedom — mostly, patriarchal restrictions had no place in her early life, at least within the family.

Slender and tall, Renuka was a bright student from the beginning. Because our father was a schoolteacher, our family moved from one village to another frequently. She studied in government schools across Kolkonda, Sitarampuram, Kadavendi, Mothkur, and Devaruppula, eventually completing her Intermediate at the Government Junior College in Jangaon.

At the age of 14, while preparing for her Class 10 exams, Renuka fell ill with tuberculosis. She

had persistent fever, but doctors failed to diagnose the illness in time. For months, she went without proper treatment, and her health deteriorated significantly. It was only later, when Dr. Kotilingam in Warangal correctly identified the condition, that she began recovering. But the damage to her lungs had already been done. Though she regained her health, the illness had already damaged some lung tissue — and its effects stayed with her for life. She couldn't run, couldn't walk fast, and would tire quickly.

During her Intermediate, her elder brother became a full-time activist. After she completed her Intermediate, the family moved from Kadavendi to Mothkur. We sold our house in Kadavendi and built one in Mothkur. Around that time, our family decided to get Renuka married. She wasn't ready — her heart was set on continuing her studies — but she couldn't bring herself to go against her father's wishes. He promised she could pursue her education even after marriage — so she reluctantly agreed.

But within months, her husband began harassing her mentally. Renuka, who had silently endured the pain at first, eventually opened up when it became too much to bear. The family stood by her, and the marriage was annulled. With her parents' encouragement, she resumed her studies. Her sense of freedom returned — and with it, her journey truly began.

She completed her B.A. as an external candidate from Osmania University, and later appeared for both the M.A. (Telugu) and law entrance exams. She secured admission for M.A. (Telugu) at Koti Women's College in Hyderabad and for LLB at Padmavati University in Tirupati. Though the distance was considerable, she chose law and moved to Tirupati in 1992.

Renuka had always been an avid reader and a lover of literature. Now, she immersed herself even deeper. At the time, the revolutionary movement in Kadavendi and across northern Telangana was gaining momentum. Renuka was inspired by the struggles — against bonded labour, for better wages, for land to the landless, and against violence on women. These struggles deeply shaped her worldview.

Her own painful marital experience had already given her a sharp understanding of patriarchy. Around the same time, feminist literature was beginning to flourish in Andhra Pradesh. Renuka read widely — but she also began asking questions: How do the communists, who are working for a new democratic and socialist society, address women's issues? How seriously do they treat gender equality? These questions stayed with her.

It was around this time that she met Padmakka, party's town organiser in Tirupati. One afternoon in 1992, on the recommendation of martyred Comrade Puli Anjanna, Padmakka came to Renuka's hostel to meet her. Renuka could not have known then that this meeting would shape the course of her life forever. Padmakka patiently answered her questions and urged her to join the local women's movement. In 1994, Padmakka was killed in a fake encounter. Renuka was devastated. It took her a long time to come to terms with that loss.

Slowly, Renuka began to combine study with activism. She worked with the organisation Mahila Shakti and began writing regularly for its publication Mahila Margam. She continued her studies while participating in organisational work — and also began writing short stories. In fact, even before leaving for Tirupati, she had submitted a story to Nalupu magazine. But the last page went missing, and the story was never published. While she was in Tirupati, she wrote several stories

and shared them with literary friends who offered honest feedback and helped her improve her craft.

By 1996, Renuka was ready to become a full-time party worker. The party encouraged her to take up urban mass work. She began working on issues like dowry deaths, sexual harassment, and the everyday struggles of slum-dwellers. She led campaigns and was on the editorial board of Mahila Margam, ensuring that it came out regularly. She also became part of the Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya, a collective of women's organisations.

During this time, Renuka would sometimes go into the Nallamala forest to meet the party leadership. She was working under martyred Comrade Lingamurthy (Krishnanna). At that time, Santosh was the Andhra Pradesh State Secretary and a member of the Central Committee. Although the name 'Santosh' was familiar to those from Kadavendi, Renuka had not known him personally.

It was Krishnanna and another martyred Comrade RK who suggested the idea of marriage to both of them, separately. They were given the opportunity to meet, talk and think it through. Over time, love grew between them. They married. But because Santosh was a top leader, and Renuka was engaged in public mass work, the party advised that the marriage be kept secret. Only the top leadership and a few comrades close to Renuka knew.

But their time together was short. On December 2, 1999, Santosh was killed — along with Nalla Adi Reddy and Sheelam Naresh — in a staged encounter. Renuka was heartbroken. Since their marriage had been kept secret, she couldn't even cry her heart out in the open. She would often recall how those few years had been precious. They had shared mutual interests in books, cinema, stories, and revolutionary ideas. Santosh's thoughts on her stories — his suggestions, his encouragement — she held close, and often spoke of them.

After this, Renuka's work shifted to Visakhapatnam. There, she practised law while continuing her involvement in mass organisations. She mobilised poor women from the slums and stayed active in literary work under the leadership of Comrade Kaumudi, the secretary of the Visakhapatnam City Committee. Kaumudi was already well known — a revolutionary poet held in high regard within literary and activist circles. Their meetings often flowed with poetry, politics, laughter, and reflection — just as much as with organisational matters. Renuka always remembered those days with deep fondness.

But in late 2003, Kaumudi too was killed in a fake encounter. With that, Renuka's open revolutionary life came to an end. The police were after her. She was constantly on the run. Finally, with the help of committed revolutionary supporters, she was moved to Maharashtra, and then handed over to the party leadership. From there, she went to Odisha and took charge of the Bansadhara division. She quickly learned Odia — and before long, began writing in that language too.

In 2005, she chose Shakhamuri Apparao as her life partner. Though they had not met before, both had heard of each other, and had great respect for each other's journeys. Both had experienced pain in earlier marriages. Their new bond was based on deep understanding. But their responsibilities kept them apart most of the time. In March 2010, news of Shakhamuri's martyrdom reached her. Another blow. Another grief to carry. But she never let it shake her revolutionary conviction.

She continued writing. In 2006, the party entrusted her with the editorial responsibility of Kranti magazine. With that, her work moved from Odisha to Dandakaranya — a land that would become her home for nearly two decades. It remained so until the evening of April 1, 2025, when her mortal body, lying still in an ambulance, along the quiet highway that runs beside the Indravati river, crossed the Godavari river, and entered the border of Telangana. It was a journey of return — across the forests, rivers, and paths she had once walked with quiet strength and unwavering purpose. The land she had given her life to, bore witness, once more, to her passing.

As for her literary work, starting with Bhavukata, she went on to write Metlameeda, Prava-ham, Iddaru Tallullu, Amma Kosam, and nearly forty short stories, mostly under the pen name ‘Midko’. She also wrote a few poems under the name ‘Zameen’, and analytical pieces and books using the name ‘BD Damayanti’. In her later years, she penned powerful and evocative works such as Pachchani Batikulpai Nippai Kurustunna Rajyam, Mandutunna Gayalu, Vimukti Batlo Narayanapatna, and Dandakaranyalo Green Hunt, and so on.

Her hallmark was a writing style that was clear, brief, and direct — language that moved readers deeply, without the need for ornamentation or exaggeration. She consciously avoided stereotypical writing and never leaned on jargon for effect. Just like the way she speaks, where she would never use a word more than necessary, her writing carried the same restraint and precision. She spoke little, observed keenly, and when something felt wrong, she never hesitated to raise her voice — fearlessly and without favour. There was a quiet strength in the way she engaged with people — an affectionate demeanor, free from pretence — that drew many towards her.

From Mahila Margam to Viplavi, Viplava Patham, Kranti, Prabhat, Poru Mahila, and Lade-mayena Mahila, she contributed tirelessly — as a writer, an editor, a guiding leader. Despite her fragile health, Renuka worked with an inner discipline that astonished those around her. Many remember the hours she spent at her computer, shaping each sentence, each page, with quiet intensity.

Even amidst her political responsibilities as a member of the Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, she found time to write personal letters to comrades. These letters — filled with insight, gentle critique, and sincere warmth — are still carefully preserved by many. Even those who left the movement keep them safe. That is the kind of imprint she left on everyone who knew her.

In 2014, when her elder brother exited the movement, Renuka was deeply hurt. She opposed his backstep, and wrote to their parents with unwavering clarity: she would never leave the revolutionary path — not until her final breath.

And she never did.

Finally ... as a communist revolutionary, writer, and editor — perhaps we, her family, would never be able to fully grasp the depth of her accomplishments. We may never truly understand them all. But the way she grew, steadily and with conviction, and the way she stood firm for what she believed in — Renuka’s life will always remain a source of pride for us.

To end the suffering of the working class, to build a society free of exploitation and oppression, to put an end to gender violence and discrimination, to abolish caste-based injustice and attacks, to stand against religious fundamentalism — these were her dreams. And now, fulfilling them is our collective responsibility.

Her immortality lies in the path she carved out and the lives she touched. She will continue to inspire us; because her death was not just an ordinary passing. As a mother says in one of her stories: “A death that stands tall like a column, right in the middle of the village.”